PLANNING

Virginia G. Young and Minnie-Lou Lynch summarized the needs and assumptions for library planning when they wrote:

> Planning is essentially preparation for change–the look before the leap.
>
> To move the library forward in an age of change necessitates careful planning today. There are some basic assumptions with which trustees will want to begin.
>
> 1. Planning is essential.
>
> 2. The librarian and board are partners in planning.
>
> 3. The end objective of library planning is service to people.
>
> 4. Local planning should be related to the overall state plan where one exists.
>
> Planning is simply controlled change. How well trustees and librarians plan today, how well they instigate and control change, will determine the effectiveness of the library tomorrow.
> "The Trustee and Planning," in *The Library Trustee, A Practical Guidebook*

Start by Reviewing Planning Resources

Board members will find thousands of books, articles, videos, and Websites focused on "planning." Many authors vary in their definitions, structures and recommended order of activities, but the reader will soon recognize the commonalities.

Literature that discusses planning and program measurements in government services and in non-profit organizations can be especially useful because these agencies and libraries share similar service delivery challenges.

Another source to review is the state's formally adopted statewide plan, *Designing our Future*, developed under the guidance and direction of the Washington State Library Commission and the Washington Advisory Council on Libraries. The plan is available in print from the State Library, as well as on the State Library Website
http://www.statelib.wa.gov

Attending planning workshops sponsored by library associations, working with a consultant, or investigating online training courses are some of the options that boards might want to consider before embarking on a planning process.

Touch Base With Others

Arranging a meeting or a telephone call to talk with other library boards and library directors about their planning experiences is one way to get a general sense of what planning process might be appropriate for your library. Reading some of the library plans posted on the World Wide Websites of Washington and other libraries is very informative.

Some communities may have a cooperative planning process underway that the board may wish to join or cooperate with in order to accomplish common activities such as a community survey. Typically, these groups include the local planning commission, a community service organization, or a school district that serves the same area as the library. At the very least be sure to communicate with these groups so the library is fully knowledgeable of their planning activities and vice versa.

Planning is an Orderly Process

While off-the-cuff conversations about "What we ought to do next year" may be fun and sometimes fruitful, they can't deliver the focused results of a planning process.

Planning is an orderly process that poses, investigates, and answers a set of questions. Although the process is fairly standard, the results still depend on the intuition, reasoning, and decision-making skills of the board because no amount of research and evaluation can do more than generate options. The role of the board is to fully consider the implications of each option and to make the hard choices and decisions that will guide the future of the library.

Fundamental Questions Posed in the Planning Process

The planning process should address a series of questions. The answers to the questions will result in philosophical guidelines reflected in the mission statement; research and analysis that sets the stage for board decision-making; and operational plans that will be implemented on a daily basis.

The board, director, staff, and community each have roles and responsibilities that contribute to the total planning process. For example, the board and director are key in establishing the mission statement while library staff generate the measurable activities that will accomplish the goals and objectives.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS TO ASK IN THE PLANNING PROCESS	WHAT'S THE RESULT OF ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS?	WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ANSWERING THE QUESTION?
What's our purpose?	Mission statement	Board, Director, Key Staff
What does success look like for us?	Vision statement	Board, Director, Key Staff
Who do we serve and what do our customers want from us?	Analysis of community characteristics, peoples priorities	Director, Staff, perhaps a consultant to gather and analyze survey data. Board may hold hearings.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS POSED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS	WHAT'S THE RESULT OF ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS?	WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ANSWERING THE QUESTION?
Where are we now?	Analysis of library statistics, programs & services showing strengths and weaknesses	Director, Staff, perhaps a consultant to gather and analyze data. Board may hold hearings.
Where do we want to go now?	Goal statements that incorporate direction established in mission and vision. Will address major library issues	Board, Director, Key Staff
How will we get there and what is our timetable?	Objective statements that link to goals	Director, Staff
What staff, money, equipment and other resources will we need to allocate?	Activities that allocate resources and make specific assignments to persons, teams or departments	Director, Staff
How do we judge whether we've achieved our plans?	Regularly evaluate progress towards achieving goals, and the measurable objectives, activities.	Board, Director, Staff
What next?	Evaluate successes as well as remaining challenges, begin next planning cycle	Board, Director, Staff

Many authors cite the "what next" step as "starting over." Although the planning process does start over, the library isn't just moving in circles. The Public Library Association *Planning for Results, A Public Library Transformation Process Guidebook* likens this step to:

> "…a helix, an upward spiral. You start from wherever you are, move through a series of planning and implementation steps, and then you find yourself not where you began, but at a higher level of service ready to continue on an upward path."

Roles of Board Members and the Library Director in a Planning Process

The board is usually most involved in establishing the mission of the library, the vision statement and the primary goal statements. Frequently the board will delegate the responsibility for the planning process to the library director with the recommendation to establish a steering committee that includes stakeholders and involves the board members as appropriate.

During the planning process the board of trustees is responsible for:
- Evaluating the proposed planning process structure to ensure that it reflects the library circumstances.

- Judging whether the proposed planning process can be completed within a reasonable time with a reasonable expenditure of effort.

- Formally adopting the planning process and its supporting budget.

- Supporting the work of the library director and steering committee as they direct and coordinate the planning process.

- Ensuring that the community has opportunities to be heard and to be involved in the process.

- Creating and formally adopting the values, vision, mission, and goals statements in coordination with the library director and key staff.

- Evaluating reports, research, options and draft planning documents, giving direction and suggestions as appropriate.

- Formally adopting the plan and ensuring that it is incorporated into the everyday business of the library and reported on at board meetings.

- Making certain that the plan and its anticipated results are regularly evaluated by staff and by the board.

- Reviewing and evaluating progress and ensuring that the plan is updated.

- Communicating about the planning process and the resulting plan to the public, governmental officials, and other local libraries.

The library director is responsible for, or providing for, the following:
- Acting as technical advisor to the board.

- Proposing the initial parameters of the plan, the timelines, the internal and external participants, and their roles.

- Leading the planning effort, coordinating between the board, steering or other committees, staff, external stakeholders, and the community.

- Monitoring progress and making regular reports to the board and staff.

- Communicating throughout the planning process with staff, the community, other governmental units, and organizations.

- Gathering and evaluating data about the community and its priorities.

- Coordinating as appropriate with other local planning efforts.

- Gathering and evaluating data about library use, library users, library programs, facilities, equipment, systems, etc.

- Once the mission, vision and goals are adopted, leading staff in the process of identifying and writing objectives and measurable action plans.

- Preparing draft plan for review and comment of board and others.

- Finalizing plan and submitting to board for approval.

- Implementing the plan, with regular review of progress.

- Publishing the planning document, as well as in an executive summary, and promoting the plan throughout the community.

- Regularly reviewing and evaluating plan, incorporating updates, and implementing them.

Some Considerations and Cautions

The following is a compilation of "reminders" that can be found throughout planning literature:

- Even the most thorough research and in-depth discussions will not always result in an obvious answer. Expect to make some hard decisions.

- Be sure to test your conclusions so the plan doesn't incorporate unreasonable assumptions or inaccurate information that will skew decisions.

- The plan isn't cast in stone. The plan should not micromanage staff. It should offer leeway for staff to be creative, to analyze what works and doesn't work, and to create new options and alternatives.

- Don't expect the plan to anticipate future decisions. Expect unanticipated projects, new programs or new directions to come from external and internal sources. Make decisions based on the guidance of the plan and the knowledge gained through the planning process.

- Planning takes time, effort, and authentic involvement of many people to do it "right." Be sure you're taking enough time, making enough effort, and involving key people.

- Planning isn't action. The world won't stop because the plan isn't finished. Make the best decisions that you can under the circumstances and move on.

- Don't be surprised if there are philosophical conflicts and practical disagreements. Look for win-win solutions.

- Don't assume that another library's plan or process can be transferred wholesale to your library.

- Be sure your plan is specific so staff will have clear guidance and understand the intended results.

- Don't be surprised when new information or a new insight sends planners back to revisit previous decisions or assumptions.

Who Should be Involved in the Planning Process?

An inclusive process not only results in additional skills and knowledge, it benefits the library by generating interest among stakeholders and potential library customers. It can also generate new enthusiasm among staff.

Staff and other people who are involved in the process help build support for the plan because they understand the rationale underlying decisions. Broad participation also benefits the planning process because it brings new ideas that will make the plan work better, and it incorporates a variety of experiences that may contribute to identifying problems that aren't obvious at first glance.

It may be very helpful to have some people from outside the library participate in the entire planning process. Encourage the community to offer their ideas and concerns during public forums, surveys, or to participate in some of the planning retreats or other activities. What is important is that interested individuals, including customers, volunteers, Friends of the Library, library foundation members, elected officials, and community organizations have the opportunity to be heard by the planners and the library board.

Key administrative staff should be involved throughout the entire process. At the very least, the entire staff needs to be involved in the collection of data, identifying strengths and weakness, and establishing objectives and activities. In the long run the genuine involvement of staff may be the deciding factor in success, because it is they who must incorporate the plan into everyday operations.

Will the Process Require a Consultant or Facilitator?

The board might elect to hire a consultant to familiarize them with planning processes or to facilitate the entire planning process. Carter McNamara cites seven instances when a board might wish to consider an outside facilitator:

- Your organization has not conducted strategic planning before.

- For a variety of reasons, previous strategic planning was not deemed to be successful.

- There appears to be a wide range of ideas and/or concerns among organization members about strategic planning and current organizational issues to be addressed in the plan.

- There is no one in the organization whom members feel has sufficient facilitation skills.

- No one in the organization feels committed to facilitating strategic planning for the organization.

- Leaders believe that an inside facilitator will either inhibit participation from others or will not have the opportunity to fully participate in planning themselves.

- Leaders want an objective voice, i.e., someone who is not likely to have strong predisposition about the organization's strategic issues and ideas.

  "*Strategic Planning in nonprofit or for-profit organizations*"
  http://www.mapnp.org/library/plan_dec/str_plan/str_plan.htm

Adopting Your Planning Process

There's no perfect planning process for libraries or any other organization. Planners may decide to adopt a process as is, they may decide to modify, or they may decide to combine more than one process to fit their situation.

One planning process that libraries might consider is the Public Library Association *Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process.* The United Way of America is another to consider. The Institute of Museums and Library Services (IMLS) is currently working with United Way to adapt their performance measurement system so it will be applicable to Library Services and Technology Act grants.

PLA Planning Process Activities

In 1998 the Public Library Association published *Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process, The Guidebook and The How-To Manual.* This is a major revision of the 1987 *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries*. The *Planning for Results* publication shifts the emphasis from choosing library "roles" to formulating more focused "service responses" based on community needs and how to implement them.

The activities listed below are adapted from the PLA *Planning for Results* as an example of the tasks included in a planning process.

- Establish who will lead the process, who else should be involved, the time period, how the tasks will be carried out, factors to consider, levels of effort to be expended, and what documentation will be needed.

- Estimate the level of effort for each task, set the planning timetable, and develop the planning process budget. Prepare for keeping people informed, select the planning committee, and orient the planning committee.

- Articulate a community vision, scan the community, identify community needs, scan the library, determine which community needs the library should address, and write the library vision statement.

- Select service responses (see ALA Website for list of responses) and write the library mission statement.

- Set goals, review library measurement and evaluation techniques, develop an array of objectives, and select objectives.

- Determine available resources, identify activities necessary to meet objectives, and revisit the impact of your choices.

- Compile the draft plan, obtain final approval, publish, and distribute the final plan.

Writing the Plan

The planning process will result in data, descriptions, options, and possibilities that need to be melded into a cohesive written plan that finalizes decisions, provides guidance to the library board and staff, and informs the public. A potential outline to follow when writing the plan is to follow the same order as the "Fundamental Questions" chart found on pages 16.2 and 16.3.

In addition to the complete detailed plan that is needed for internal library use, an executive summary should be prepared to inform the public, community organizations, elected officials, and others.

Adopting the Plan

The board of trustees formally adopts the completed plan in a regular board meeting. In Optional Municipal Code cities, although it is assumed that city authorities have been involved in the process, the board will likely submit the document for consideration and approval.

The Plan is a Public Record

The Washington Open Public Records law requires that "planning policies and goals, and interim and final planning decisions" must be available to the public. A number of Washington public libraries have posted the executive summary of their adopted plan on their Web page.

Some Definitions of Planning Terms

Within the universe of planning literature there are differences in terminology and a variety of recommended process sequences. Following are some basic definitions and some of the variations:

Planning
The *Utah Public Library Trustee Handbook* succinctly defines planning as:
"A continuous process in which needs are assessed, priorities are determined, conditions and circumstances are considered, goals and objectives are set, a plan is designed, and progress is evaluated."

Vision Statement
A vision statement is a guide to what the library would deem a success. A vision statement is memorable, realistic, and brief while challenging and inspiring staff to achieve their mission.

Mission Statement
A mission statement briefly answers purpose questions such as: Why does the library exist? Who do we serve? What do we do? What are the essential values of the library?

Strategic Planning
Strategic planning assumes a changing external and internal environment and seeks to achieve high-level identification of issues and potential solutions. The intent is to position the library so it can successfully anticipate and respond to dynamic new trends, and surprises. It assumes that there will be a range of futures and a number of potential resolutions. It also assumes that the governing board members will prioritize the most likely trends and issues and determine how the library might respond.

Long-range Planning
Long-range planning assumes a period of time where there will be a stable, generally predictable environment. The focus is to translate the strategic planning goals into objectives that provide the foundation for developing annual budgets and operational work programs. A long-range plan generally addresses periods of two to three years depending on the boards' comfort with the predictability of the environment.

Short-range or Operational Planning
The focus is on being practical, adaptable, and detailed. Operational work plans are usually developed in conjunction with the annual review of progress towards meeting the goals and objectives of the long-range plan. They are action oriented, measurable, and correspond to the library fiscal year.

Goals
A goal is a broad general statement of a desired condition, flowing from the mission statement. They generally are not time specific, nor are they measurable. Goals may relate to library services, managing library resources in order to implement service goals, or administrative goals that set priorities for library management.

Objectives
Objectives are the bridge from the current status to accomplish the desired goal. They are measurable statements, describing an objective result that will be achieved, within a specific time period. They include an action verb that relates to the desired change. Objectives help ensure accountability, inform employees of work expectations, and quality of services. They provide a standard by which the board and others can judge progress. They do not describe "how" the objective will be achieved.

Activities
Activities are the "how." These are the actions designed to accomplish one or more objectives or goals. An activity obliges the library to consider what they can accomplish within their existing resources and then to allocate resources such as staff time and expertise, money, or equipment in order to be successful.

Performance Measures
Performance measures are concerned with the results of the services libraries deliver. They help provide a basis for assessing the economy, efficiency, and the effectiveness of those services.

United Way of America Definitions for Program Outcomes
In 1996 the United Way of America published "*Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*. It was a seminal document in that other agencies, including the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, have begun to incorporate the performance measures approach.

The following excerpt of definitions, published with permission of the United Way, defines the outcome measurement terms and shows a United Way process model. Although the examples deal specifically with the people and services of the United Way of America, the examples suggest how libraries might consider measuring the impact of their services.

- **Inputs** are resources a program uses to achieve program objectives. Examples are staff, volunteers, facilities, equipment, curricula, and money. A program uses inputs to support activities.

- **Activities** are what a program does with its inputs–the services it provides to fulfill its mission. Examples are sheltering homeless families, educating the public about signs of child abuse, and providing adult mentors for youth. Program activities result in outputs.

- **Outputs** are products of a program's activities, such as the number of meals provided, classes taught, brochures distributed, or participants served. Another term for "outputs" is "units of service." A program's outputs should produce desired outcomes for the program's participants.

- **Outcomes** are benefits for participants during or after their involvement with a program. Outcomes may relate to knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, behavior, condition, or status. Examples of outcomes include greater knowledge of nutritional needs, improved reading skills, more effective responses to conflict, getting a job, and having greater financial stability.
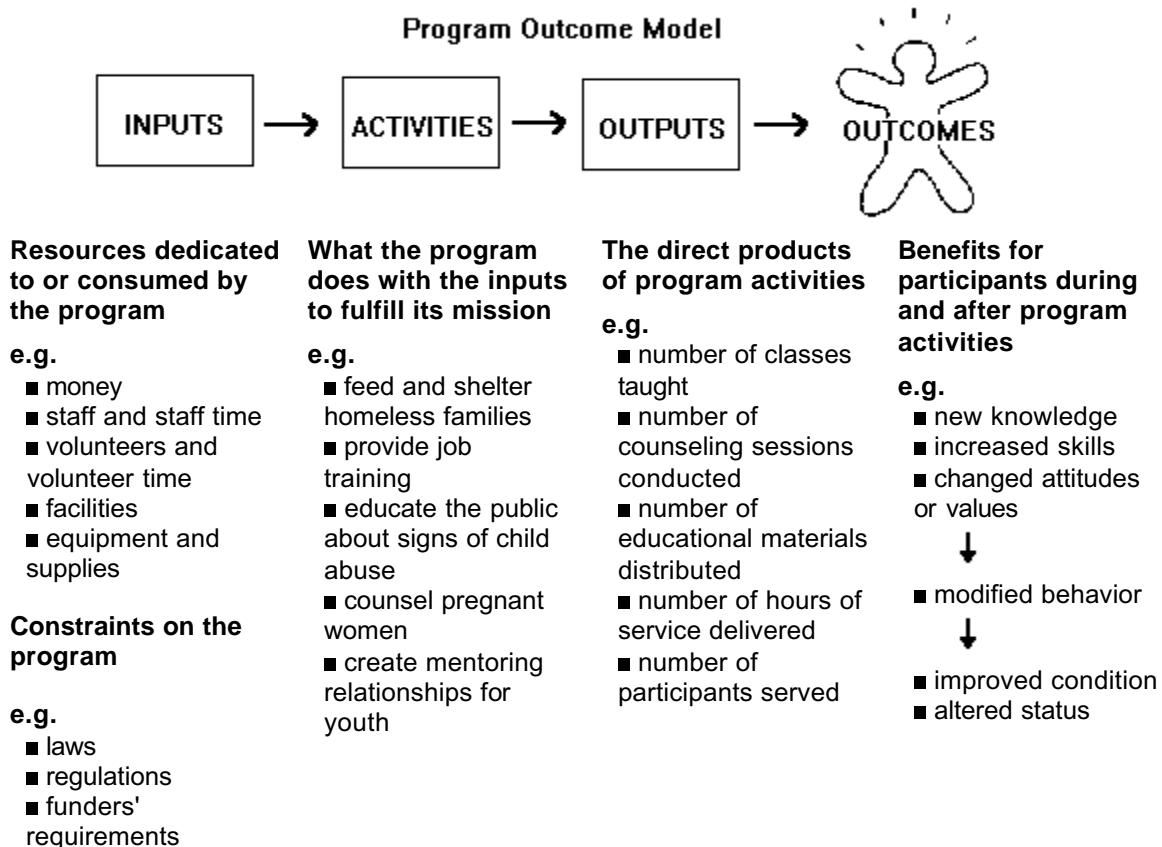
  For a particular program, there can be various "levels" of outcomes, with initial outcomes leading to longer-term ones. For example, a youth in a mentoring program who receives one-to-one encouragement to improve academic performance may attend school more regularly, which can lead to getting better grades, which can lead to graduating.

- **Outcome indicators** are the specific items of information that track a program's success on outcomes. They describe observable, measurable characteristics or changes that represent achievement of an outcome. For example, a program whose desired outcome is that participants pursue a healthy lifestyle could define "healthy lifestyle" as not smoking; maintaining a recommended weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol level; getting at least two hours of exercise each week; and wearing seat belts consistently. The number and percent of program participants who demonstrate these behaviors then is an indicator of how well the program is doing with respect to the outcome.

- **Outcome targets** are numerical objectives for a program's level of achievement on its outcomes. After a program has had experience with measuring outcomes, it can use its findings to set targets for the number and percent of participants expected to achieve desired outcomes in the next reporting period. It also can set targets for the amount of change it expects participants to experience.

- **Benchmarks** are performance data that are used for comparative purposes. A program can use its own data as a baseline benchmark against which to compare future performance. It also can use data from another program as a benchmark. In the latter case, the other program often is chosen because it is exemplary and its data are used as a target to strive for, rather than as a baseline.

Note: Outcomes sometimes are confused with outcome **indicators**, specific items of data that are tracked to measure how well a program is achieving an outcome, and with outcome **targets**, which are objectives for a program's level of achievement.

For example, in a youth development program that creates internship opportunities for high school youth, an **outcome** might be that participants develop expanded views of their career options. An **indicator** of how well the program is succeeding on this outcome could be the number and percent of participants who list more careers of interest to them at the end of the program than they did at the beginning of the program. A **target** might be that 40 percent of participants list at least two more careers after completing the program than they did when they started it.

Source: Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach (1996)
Used by Permission, United Way of America

Program Outcome Model

INPUTS → ACTIVITIES → OUTPUTS → OUTCOMES

Resources dedicated to or consumed by the program	**What the program does with the inputs to fulfill its mission**	**The direct products of program activities**	**Benefits for participants during and after program activities**
e.g. ■ money ■ staff and staff time ■ volunteers and volunteer time ■ facilities ■ equipment and supplies	**e.g.** ■ feed and shelter homeless families ■ provide job training ■ educate the public about signs of child abuse ■ counsel pregnant women ■ create mentoring relationships for youth	**e.g.** ■ number of classes taught ■ number of counseling sessions conducted ■ number of educational materials distributed ■ number of hours of service delivered ■ number of participants served	**e.g.** ■ new knowledge ■ increased skills ■ changed attitudes or values ↓ ■ modified behavior ↓ ■ improved condition ■ altered status
Constraints on the program **e.g.** ■ laws ■ regulations ■ funders' requirements			

Source: Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach (1996)
Used by Permission, United Way of America

RESOURCES

Selected Internet Sites

American Library Association
Planning for Results: Library Service Responses.
http://www.pla.org/plansvce.htm

Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits.
http://www.mapnp.org/library/plan_dec/str_plan/str_plan/basics.htm

Performances Measures for Government. Governmental Accounting Standards Board, Sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.
http://www.accounting.Rutgers.edu/raw/seagov/pmg/index.html

United Way of America. Outcome Measurement Resource Network
http://www.national.unitedway.org/outcomes

Washington State Library. *Designing Our Future*. http://www.statelib.wa.gov
http://wlo.statelib.wa.gov/services/statewide_plan/spr_notes.htm

Selected Books and Plans

Himmel, Ethel and William James Wilson. *Planning for Results, A public Library Transformation Process. The Guidebook. The How-To Manual*. American Library Association, 1998.

Washington State Library. *Washington Public Library Statistical Report.*
http://wlo.statelib.wa.gov/services/STATS/stats.htm

Young, Virginia G. *The Library Trustee: A Practical guidebook*. American Library Association, 1995.